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Remote interpretation

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report reviews the background, organization and implementation of the second full-scale experiment in remote interpretation conducted by the United Nations. On the basis of the conclusions drawn from the experiment, a description is made of the body of knowledge currently available in the field of remote interpretation, covering telecommunications and other technical issues, the likely impact of remote servicing on the quality of interpretation and the working conditions of interpreters, and financial questions and the cost effectiveness of remote interpretation.

* A/56/150.

** The finalization of this report was postponed by two weeks after the prescribed date in order to include the most up-to-date available information concerning communication costs.

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Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 54/248 D of 23 December 1999, and paragraphs 8 and 10 of section IV of resolution 55/222 of 23 December 2000. Other provisions of those resolutions that are relevant to the question of remote interpretation have also been taken into consideration in the preparation of the report.

I. First experiment and its legislative mandate

2. The United Nations conducted its first full-scale remote interpretation experiment from 25 January to 5 February 1999, when a two-week session held at Geneva was provided with interpretation in six languages by a team of interpreters working from Vienna. The experiment was considered to be "full-scale" because it entailed the use of all six official languages and the continuous use of remote interpretation throughout the duration of a typical United Nations session. A report on that experiment (A/54/176) was issued in 1999 and was considered by the Committee on Conferences and the General Assembly.

3. The experiment was undertaken in compliance with paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 A of 1 December 1998, in which the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General, without prejudice to the practices already used to meet interpretation requirements, to examine the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures based in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and to report thereon.

4. One conclusion reached on the basis of the first experiment was that the use of high-capacity digital telephone lines (the integrated services digital network, or ISDN) made it technically possible for interpreters at a remote location to service meetings held at a different location, during a continuous period of two weeks, without disruptions to the participants and to their nearly complete satisfaction. Specifically, sound of a quality very close to the standard requirements for simultaneous interpretation was reliably transmitted thanks to the use of a sufficient number of ISDN links.

5. Other conclusions, drawn from questionnaires answered by the interpreters, were less positive. The quality of the visual information about the meetings and the speakers that the interpreters received by means of two videoconferencing systems was deficient in several respects. Interpreters found that video broadcasts using insufficient bandwidth led to considerable eye strain; that sudden camera movements caused dizziness and loss of concentration; and that it was difficult to find a satisfactory compromise between the amount of light used in the room where the screens were placed and the sharpness of the projected image. In general, interpreters indicated that they needed to see what was taking place in the meeting room. They said that, under normal on-site conditions, they selected various views of the speaker and their audience only when these views did not interfere with the simultaneous processing of all the other information required for interpretation. Working remotely, on the other hand, the interpreters felt that the selection and timing of video images by a camera operator for the entire team could not substitute for their own individual selection and timing of the images. Video broadcasts as a substitute for being in the meeting room had serious limitations.

6. Although 94 per cent of the users surveyed were satisfied with the quality of the interpretation during the session, interpreters were dissatisfied with the quality of their work. They stressed that they were able to maintain their performance at an acceptable level, but only at a higher psychological and physiological cost. The experiment established that remote interpretation had a cumulative effect on interpreters' health, pointing to stress, fatigue, eyestrain, loss of concentration, lack of motivation and overall anxiety. Since it could be argued that, with better visual information, the health impact perhaps would have been less significant, a major recommendation derived from the first experiment was that, in future experiments, technological solutions had to be sought that might bring the physical environment of remote interpretation as close as possible to normal on-site conditions.

II. Need for a second experiment and its legislative mandate

7. After the first experiment, it was felt that, since United Nations meetings for which the use of remote

interpretation could be contemplated are convened in many different locations, the feasibility and potential of remote interpretation in the United Nations context needed also to be assessed in circumstances requiring the use of satellite services. That was highlighted by the objective of increasing the number of United Nations and other meetings held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, where no ISDN services and no interpretation staff were available in 1999.

8. In late 1999, preparations were begun for an experiment involving the servicing from Geneva of a session held at Nairobi. Communications would be established through the Mercure satellite connection between Nairobi and Leuk, Switzerland, which the European Space Agency (ESA) makes available to the United Nations Environment Programme. The capacity of the satellite connection needed to be upgraded with additional bandwidth, which could be leased commercially. Other improvements in telephone lines at both ends and purchases or rental of videoconference and communications equipment were also necessary. In addition, some components used in the Vienna-Geneva experiment had to be shipped on loan from Vienna to Nairobi. In 2000, the calendar of meetings at Nairobi included only one session, scheduled for 8 to 12 May, that was suitable for a full-scale experiment.

9. Failure to secure timely confirmation from ESA that it would lend the six modems required for the experiment and delays in preparatory tests led to the cancellation of the experiment, which could not be rescheduled because, as indicated, there was no other meeting that would be suitable for a full-scale test. A report on the matter was issued in July 2000 (A/55/134) and considered by the Committee on Conferences, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the General Assembly.

10. In 1999, the Committee on Conferences, having examined the report on the first experiment (A/54/176), commended the efforts of the Secretariat to develop a system of remote interpretation and looked forward to additional experiments in the future. The Committee requested the Secretariat to further refine the cost considerations of remote interpretation, taking into account not only technological possibilities but also the cost benefits of remote interpretation, including the relative cost advantages of the different conference centres that were likely providers of remote interpretation services, and to report thereon.[1]

11. The General Assembly, in its resolution 54/248 of 23 December 1999, decided that, in the absence of an Assembly decision to the contrary, the use of remote interpretation should not constitute an alternative to the current institutionalized system of interpretation, and that the use of remote interpretation should not affect the quality of interpretation or in itself lead to any further reductions in language posts, nor should it affect the equal treatment of the six official languages. At the same time, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to keep under review the introduction and use of any new technology, in particular remote interpretation, and to report thereon to the Assembly on a regular basis.

12. In 2000, the Committee on Conferences, having considered the report on the cancellation of the Geneva-Nairobi experiment, requested the Secretariat to keep it informed of future activities; reiterated its understanding that remote interpretation was not intended to replace traditional interpretation without the explicit approval of the General Assembly; requested that future reports include an analysis of the cost of any proposed system and of its impact on the working conditions of interpreters; and recommended that remote interpretation not be confined to specific duty stations, that each duty station be considered both as recipient and provider and that the Secretariat explore every opportunity for its introduction.[2] ACABQ, for its part, regretted that the Geneva-Nairobi experiment had not taken place and urged the Secretariat to clarify the technical issues involved as quickly as possible (see A/55/430, para. 10).

13. The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/222 of 23 December 2000, reiterated the provisions included in resolution 54/248. In addition, it reiterated its understanding that the introduction of remote interpretation was not intended to replace traditional interpretation systems without the explicit approval of the General Assembly; it requested the Secretary-General to ensure that trials of remote interpretation not be confined to specific duty stations, and that each duty station be considered as both recipient and provider; and it requested the Secretary-General to ensure that future reports include an analysis of all costs of any proposed system, its impact on the working conditions of interpreters, the level of service provided to delegates, the satisfaction of delegations with the interpretation and the technical aspects of this method of interpretation. The Assembly also took note

of the technical difficulties and timing problems that had prevented the Geneva-Nairobi experiment and requested the Secretary-General to further clarify the technical issues involved.

III. Aims of the second experiment

14. In view of the conclusions drawn from the first experiment and considering the mandate developed by legislative bodies, it was decided to conduct a second full-scale experiment aimed at: (a) testing the suitability of satellite links for remote interpretation purposes; (b) designing and testing the best possible configuration of video technology that can be used for remote interpretation purposes; (c) assessing the impact of remote interpretation on interpreters' working conditions when the best possible video equipment is used; and (d) gathering information on the costs of remote interpretation systems.

15. As had been the case with the first experiment, the test had to cover a sufficiently long period of time in order to prove the sustained reliability of the technology and to determine the cumulative effect of remote interpretation on the work of the interpreters and other conference-servicing staff, as well as on participants at the meeting. The meetings chosen should offer a wide variety of interpreting situations (both highly structured meetings and meetings with frequent spontaneous interaction) and entail the use of all six languages, in order to test relays between languages and to assess the effects of remote interpretation on participants using different languages.

16. It was felt that those objectives could be achieved by means of an experiment in which interpreters would work from booths other than those of the conference room where the meetings were taking place, but still located at the same conference centre. That would simplify the organization of the experiment. It would prevent the reoccurrence of the coordination difficulties that had led to the cancellation of the Geneva-Nairobi experiment. It would also reduce the potential cost of the experiment, essentially because a second team of interpreters would not be needed as a standby to be used in case of a technical failure.

17. At Headquarters, the Information Technology Services Division, Office of Central Support Services, Department of Management, could provide technical support and use could be made of the United Nations satellite network; therefore Headquarters was selected as the site for the experiment. Considering the nature of the different forthcoming meetings and the availability on specific dates of a second conference room from which interpreters could work remotely, it was decided that remote interpretation would be provided on a trial basis for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, from 16 to 27 April 2001. The meetings would take place in conference room 3 and interpretation would be provided from the booths in conference room 6.

IV. Characteristics of the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

18. In addition to representatives of the 53 States members of the Commission on Sustainable Development, participants included observers from many other States and representatives of local authorities, scientific communities, non-governmental organizations, trade unions and business and industry, as well as different international organizations. Interactive dialogues involving these varied groups of participants took place during the first two and a half days of the session, without prepared lists of speakers and at a rate of about two minutes allowed to each speaker. The following two days were devoted to the high-level segment, when government representatives (ministers and other high-level policy makers) delivered prepared statements at fast speeds limited to five minutes each. The second week of the session was entirely taken up by drafting work, involving a reduced number of active participants.

19. The session thus offered the opportunity to test remote interpretation in fairly different meeting formats. Contrary to the first experiment, when only a relatively small group of participants had been involved, the Commission on Sustainable Development resembled a full membership plenary conference. The proceedings were conducted in a large conference room, which was filled to capacity most of the time.

20. Remote interpretation was actually done during 16 meetings. In general, the first week called for the team of interpreters to work a full schedule of very demanding interpreting situations unrelated to the difficulties of remote interpretation. The second week proved easier in terms of interpretation content and

workload (meetings started late, finished early or were interrupted and the Commission on Sustainable Development cancelled one meeting and devoted another one to informal drafting work without interpretation). The interpreters did not seem to think that one type of meeting lent itself more to remote interpretation than another. Under normal conditions, the first week would have been more difficult as well. As it turned out, most of the session was conducted in English. The spokespersons for the Group of 77 and the European Union, who were by far the most active participants during the drafting exercises of the second week, were both English speakers. Therefore, relay and retour could not be really tested during the experiment. During the mock meetings held the week before in preparation for the experiment, however, interpreters were able to test the satellite link in those situations and the technical set-up was found to be suitable.

V. Organization and conduct of the experiment

A. Interpretation services

21. Interpretation was provided remotely by a team of 20 interpreters who volunteered or accepted to be assigned for the experiment. They were all permanent staff interpreters from Headquarters (eight), Geneva (six) and Vienna (six). The involvement of staff from the three main duty stations was considered important, in view of the possible implications of the use of remote interpretation for interpreters at all duty stations, as well as the requirement from the General Assembly that each duty station be considered both as recipient and provider of remote services.

22. One additional interpreter worked throughout the experiment from the remote location as a liaison with the conference officers working both on-site and at the remote location and with the audio and video technicians, with whom she remained in permanent contact via intercom headset. That connection was used to help spot the speaker by the cameras and also to receive feedback from the remote location to adjust the video coverage in accordance with requests from the interpreters, as conveyed by the interpreter providing liaison.

B. Conference officers and distribution officers

23. A senior conference officer working at the meeting site was designated the primary contact with the Secretary of the meeting. An additional conference officer was assigned to the remote site. The number of participants and the methods of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development require the assignment of an assistant conference officer to each meeting, in addition to the senior conference officer. During the experiment, the number of assistant conference officers was increased to two in an effort to speed up the collection of speakers' lists and all statements and texts available, which were delivered to the remote location by two messengers especially assigned to those meetings. Distribution services at the meeting site were provided by the normal number of staff, with one distribution officer being added at the remote site. The conference officer and the distribution officer working off-site were able to follow the proceedings via video and audio transmission.

24. The additional task of maintaining direct and timely communication with the remote location added to the workload of the senior conference officer working on-site. For the conference officer and the distribution officer at the remote location, the primary task was to receive documentation through the messengers and distribute it to the interpreters and to maintain communication with their counterparts working on-site. Not having to interact with participants reduced their overall workload in comparison with on-site conditions. This would make it possible for them to handle fax traffic or photocopying work during actual remote servicing conditions, when texts could not be walked to the remote location.

C. Sound transmission

25. Under the standards of the International Organization for Standardization applicable to simultaneous interpretation equipment, the minimum sound bandwidth acceptable for interpretation purposes is 12.5 kHz. Prior to the experiment, a sound quality test was conducted, during which interpreters were asked to rate remote connections through satellites providing feeds of 20 kHz and 14 kHz. Interpreters determined that the 14 kHz level assured good quality sound and was actually more suitable than the 20 kHz

level, where background noise was a problem. On that basis, during the experiment the original statements were transmitted to the interpreters using one audio channel at 14 kHz. Since requirements for the satisfactory transmission of interpretation output are not as strict, and in order to save bandwidth, six channels at 10 kHz were used to transmit the interpretations to the participants.

26. From conference room 3 (the meeting location), the floor sound was transmitted, using cables, codecs and modems installed in the satellite earth station at Headquarters, to the satellite, where it was looped and sent back by the same means to the interpreters working in conference room 6 (the remote location). The floor sound and the six language channels were likewise transmitted via satellite back from conference room 6 to the participants in conference room 3.

27. Once the sound system was installed, no staff involvement was needed for the sound transmissions between the two conference rooms, which remained stable at the expected level of quality during the entire experiment. Two audio engineers, one in each conference room, worked during the experiment. The fact that the floor sound travelled throughout the circuit, all the way to the satellite and back, resulted in a clearly perceptible delay between the sound transmitted by the public address system in conference room 3 and the sound received through the earphones. Comments about the presence of an "echo" were evidence of this.

D. Visual information

28. Since one of the purposes of the experiment was to improve as much as possible on the video system used in the first experiment, all efforts were made to use the best video technology and services available. Three cameras were installed in conference room 3 in booths above the meeting area, handled by three operators. One camera faced the participants and was used to capture the image of the speaker. The other two cameras faced the podium: one focused on the chairman or other officers, while the second one was used to provide general views of the room. In addition to the three camera operators, a television director, assisted by a technician, supervised the video transmissions and decided how to switch among the images captured by the three cameras.

29. In conference room 6, the set-up that was finally chosen by the interpreters consisted of six pairs of displays, each pair placed directly in front of each booth. Each pair consisted of one 42" plasma screen at booth level, 14 feet from the booth, and one 25" monitor at table level, 11 feet from the booth. The screen was used to project the image of the speaker and general views of the room, before the start of the meeting, while the monitor provided views of the podium and of the presiding officer as speaker.

30. Transmissions originated in the cameras in conference room 3. Via different combinations of videoconferencing systems, inverse multiplexers, codecs, modems, hard wire and ISDN phone lines, images were sent to the satellite, where they were looped and sent back using the same links. At the video control centre, the television director selected among the images received and forwarded them to the interpreters in conference room 6.

31. As the rates used for data transmission affect the quality of the image, the rates for each type of image were determined on the basis of the usefulness of each type for the interpreters. Interpreters considered that the image of the speaker was the most important one. Accordingly, it was assigned a rate of 512 kbps and was projected on the 42" plasma screen. The image of the podium was given a rate of 384 kbps and was projected on the 25" monitor. That was the set-up finally selected by the interpreters and it was used during the second week of the experiment. During the first week, the larger screen, with 128 kbps, had been used to provide general views of the meeting room, while one 25" monitor with 384 kbps gave a view of the speakers and a second 25" monitor with 256 kbps gave a view of the podium. Interpreters felt that those images were not clear enough to be useful and proposed reducing the number of images from three to two, in order to achieve better quality within approximately the same available bandwidth. One monitor was removed, but the third camera was kept in operation and was used to feed alternating views of the podium or the room at the discretion of the television director. Therefore, between the first and the second weeks, the rate for the plasma screen (image of the speaker) was increased from 384 to 512 kbps and the rate for one monitor (alternating images of the podium or the room) was increased from 256 to 384 kbps.

E. Communications issues and technical findings

32. The United Nations leases satellite capacity from two service providers. The Information Technology Services Division uses 47 MHz of this capacity to support a total of 44 links via an earth station with an 11-metre antenna located at Headquarters. These links provide voice, data and videoconference communications services. For the experiment, the Division temporarily reassigned 4.85 MHz of its bandwidth and was thus able to support the experiment within its normally available capacity. An audio-video control centre was set up to route and control the transmissions to and from the two conference rooms and to and from the satellite earth station. The staff of the centre included two videoconference operators, two television engineers and one assistant, in addition to the television director and his assistant, who controlled the camera functions.

33. At most locations, the audio-video systems connecting the conference rooms and the control centres provide high-speed and reliable transmissions because they are hard-wired, since they are quite close to each other. This is not necessarily the case between control centres and satellite earth stations, which can be quite far away from each other. In these cases, the use of ISDN lines can offer a solution. In order to compare the performance and reliability of ISDN lines with those of hard-wire connections, both approaches were used in the experiment for the transmission of video. For audio, only hard-wire connections were used.

34. In the course of the experiment, the audio and video transmissions using hard-wire connections were never interrupted. This proved the reliability of cable connectivity and of satellite performance. Connections through ISDN lines, on the other hand, presented some problems. Following interruptions during the first few days and cases in which the images froze, the circuits used for the experiment were retested by the service provider and stability improved. Even so, video transmissions involving ISDN lines continued to go down once or twice a day for about one minute. This could be attributed to the quality of the ISDN lines or the interface between ISDN lines and the satellite, the videoconference equipment or the inverse multiplexers.

35. When several ISDN lines are used to transmit a particular image, the transmission will be interrupted even if just one line goes down. This means that, as the number of lines is increased to improve the quality of the image, the risk of interruptions will also increase, particularly if the lines are used for long periods of time (several hours in the case of remote interpretation). This risk factor must be kept in mind as a trade-off to improvements in video quality.

36. Past experience with videoconferences shows that ISDN lines can provide acceptable communications links. The first full-scale experiment on remote interpretation also used ISDN lines and was not affected by interruptions. The quality of the lines, however, varies from one service provider to another and among different locations. It is necessary, therefore, to make sure that the best quality service available is used. Also, since the new models of videoconference equipment adjust themselves more flexibly for quick signal recovery and resynchronization, these new models should be used for remote interpretation.

37. The experiment proved that satellite services are a viable communications means. The satellite service remained stable at all times. While the 4.85 MHz used for the experiment can be considered a large amount of bandwidth, this did not cause any interruption in other communications handled by the Information Technology Services Division through the satellite, and the normally available capacity could be used without additional cost. It should be noted, however, that satellite services for remote interpretation can be quite expensive if extra capacity needs to be obtained commercially. Besides, if remote interpretation is conducted in a location where an earth station is not available, this service must then be acquired commercially or a mobile station must be provided. Either option will be expensive.

38. Images transmitted to a large 42" plasma screen using 512 kbps represented a marked improvement in comparison with the visual information given to the interpreters in 1999, during the first full-scale remote interpretation experiment. Further improvements should be weighed against the cost of data transmission. Although it was known that there would be a delay between the video and the audio at the remote site, resulting from the different rates at which audio data and video data were going to be transmitted to the satellite and back, the disruptive effect that the lack of synchronization had on the interpreters was originally underestimated. After the third day, the

audio signal received from the satellite was delayed by 3 milliseconds before it was forwarded to the interpreters. This improved significantly the synchronization of audio with video.

F. Participants' assessment of the experiment

39. During the two weeks of the session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, no complaints or comments of any nature were received from members of delegations or other participants about the quality of the interpretation services being provided. At the last four meetings of the session, a questionnaire was distributed in all languages asking participants to indicate if, during the session, the sound and the remote interpretation had been (a) of about the same quality as the sound and the interpretation when on-site services were provided, (b) of poorer quality, or (c) of better quality. Some participants only became aware of the fact that interpretation had been provided remotely when they saw the questionnaire.

40. The response rate was very low. Only 23 completed questionnaires were received, 14 from persons speaking in English or listening to interpretation into English, and 9 from users of other languages (4 Spanish, 3 French and 2 Arabic). Among the 14 users of English, 13 found no differences in quality in either interpretation or sound, and one felt that both had been of poorer quality than under on-site conditions. Among the nine users of other languages, six saw no difference in sound and three found it to be worse. The rating of interpretation quality in this group was much less favourable: while four saw no difference in quality, five considered it of poorer quality than on-site interpretation.

41. The low number of responses limits considerably the validity of this information. However, in the light of the fact that interpretation into English was required very infrequently because most of the session was conducted in English, the views of users of other languages can be considered particularly relevant. In any event, as indicated in paragraph 39, the dissatisfaction that those replies show did not lead to complaints during or after the session.

G. Interpreters' assessment of the experiment

42. Using a questionnaire very similar to the questionnaire used during the first experiment, after each meeting the interpreters were asked to evaluate different components of the sound and video information and the support services available to them during the experiment, as well as to assess the degree of physical and psychological effort that working in remote conditions entailed. Interpreters were asked to compare these parameters with normal, on-site conditions and to use a scale ranging from -5 to +5, where the negative values represented a deterioration, and positive values an improvement vis-à-vis normal on-site conditions.

43. The response rate was high across the board, for all interpreters and all variables, and roughly equivalent to 85 per cent. The averages of the ratings from all 20 interpreters covering the 16 meetings for which remote interpretation was provided reveal that interpreters feel that the quality of sound (-0.3) and the quality of support services (-1) was comparable to or only slightly worse than the levels prevailing under normal on-site conditions. The overall sound quality was rated better than in the first full-scale experiment (up from -0.8 to -0.3) and it would have been even closer to normal conditions if it had not been for the echo and synchronization. The visual information, on the other hand, was seen as of clearly poorer quality than the visual information available when working on-site (-2.1). Remote interpretation also demanded greater physical effort (-2.1) and led to higher psychological stress than normal on-site work (-2.4).

44. The evolution of the ratings over the two-week period was also reviewed. Values do not reveal any consistent pattern. The reconfiguration of the video set-up between the first and the second week seems to have resulted in a very small improvement in the perceived quality of the visual information. Together with the fact that, during the second week, the meetings were less difficult to interpret, the reconfiguration may have contributed to a stabilization of, and even a slight reduction in, the physical and psychological effort accompanying remote interpretation.

45. The averages of all individual ratings are valid indicators of the most prevalent view of remote interpretation among the interpreters who participated in the experiment. As it is frequently the case with

averages, they hide wide degrees of variability, or wide spreads around the average. On the other hand, a high degree of consistency at the personal level is evident: individuals who have a more positive view of the quality of the visual and sound information available to them also feel less burdened by remote working conditions, and vice versa.

H. Conclusions of the second experiment

46. The experiment allowed for testing remote interpretation in a variety of meeting formats: impromptu exchanges of views, prepared statements read at high speed, informal negotiations and drafting sessions. Interpreters did not seem to think that one type of meeting lent itself more to remote interpretation than another. Relay and retour could not be tested, since the overwhelming majority of the statements were in English.

47. The experiment showed that satellite communications can be reliably used in remote interpretation. The satellite link remained stable and provided very good sound and video transmissions when the ground segment was via hard wire. The ISDN lines used for the transmission of video signals require further attention. The interruptions that were experienced in that connection may be due to different factors that need to be determined, but may partly be a result of the simultaneous use of a relatively high number of lines in an effort to improve the quality of the images transmitted. Trade-offs between visual quality and transmission stability may be required.

48. Apart from the information provided by means of the questionnaires, the interpreters who participated in the experiment considered that an acceptable level of service had been provided by them, but that striving to maintain high professional standards under adverse conditions and to compensate for a feeling of alienation had taken a toll on the team in terms of increased fatigue. Although the sound was very good, there was an echo problem and sometimes a disorienting lack of synchronization between sound and image. For many interpreters, that remained a major problem throughout the two weeks and added to the stress they experienced.

49. Many interpreters felt that the adjustments made to the video set-up had resulted in improvements in picture quality. The image of the speakers on which most interpreters relied, however, was not always clear or stable, causing loss of concentration. Interpreters who had participated in the first experiment felt that it was better to work in a lit room, with screens placed at a more natural distance from the booths. The loss of visual information, however, remained a definite handicap. A panoramic view of the conference room providing useful information was unattainable with the technology used during the experiment. In live meetings, interpreters rely on being able to see delegates other than those actually speaking, and excellent video information might go some way towards compensating for other inherent deficiencies of remote work.

I. Cost of the experiment

50. As indicated in the relevant sections above, in addition to the staff that would normally service a session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, it was necessary to redeploy the following staff from other duties to the experiment on a full-time basis for two weeks: one interpreter to ensure liaison between the servicing room and the meeting room, two conference officers, one documents distribution officer, two messengers, one audio engineer, two videoconference operators, two television control engineers and three wide area network technicians. Extensive work by regular staff was also needed before the session for preparatory work, including equipment tests. In addition, three camera operators, one television director and two assistants were recruited specifically for the experiment. Related expenditures covering the salaries of the external staff and overtime for regularly available staff amounted to $32,700.

51. Most of the equipment used in the experiment was already available in-house. However, it was necessary to purchase four low-speed satellite modems, four audio codecs, four audio receivers and one block deconverter at a cost of $51,800. ISDN lines needed to be installed between the control centre and the satellite earth station. Installation costs amounted to $4,063 and actual use to $1,952. Satellite use did not give rise to additional expenditure, since part of the transmission capacity normally available to the Organization was reassigned to the experiment.

J. Observers attending the experiment

52. All organizations and academic institutions that have participated as members or observers in recent Inter-Agency Meetings on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) were notified of the experiment and were invited to send observers. Managers or senior members of the interpretation, administrative or technical services of the following organizations observed the experiment: International Civil Aviation Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Telecommunication Union, International Maritime Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, European Commission, European Parliament, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization of American States and United States Department of State.

VI. Conclusions: current perspectives on remote interpretation, including cost-effectiveness

53. After two full-scale experiments and although progress has been made, efforts to find technological solutions that could bring the physical environment of remote interpretation as close as possible to normal on-site conditions have been only partially successful. During the second experiment, by using higher rates of data transmission, camera operation that excluded sudden movements and panning and new screen technologies, it was possible to see the images without having to work in a dark or semi-dark room. However, the prevalent view among interpreters is still that remote interpretation will yield service at the level of quality that is customary in simultaneous interpretation only at the expense of added stress and fatigue. This health impact of remote interpretation is primarily due to the deficient synchronization between sound and image and the inability to obtain the visual information that is available on-site — two problems which require technological solutions not found so far — and to the sense of alienation, which can only be overcome through a process of adaptation to a different working environment on the part of interpreters trained to work on-site. After the second experiment, it is evident that, so long as maintaining an acceptable level of quality of service in a new working mode requires additional physical and psychological effort, typical individual workloads expected during on-site work would need to be reduced if remote interpretation were to be used.

54. The audio, video and communications equipment and the staffing and organizational arrangements for remote interpretation should be at least those used in the second experiment and described in paragraphs 25 to 38 above. Although still imperfect, they represented a marked improvement in comparison with the first experiment and provided the best technical environment for remote interpretation in six languages currently available to the Organization.

55. Related communications capacity should be as follows:

(a) Sound:	
(i) One ISDN line for the transmission of the floor sound to the interpreters (14 kHz)	128 kbps (with data compression)
(ii) Three ISDN lines for the transmission of the six languages back to the meeting (10 kHz)	384 kbps
(b) Video:	
(i) Four ISDN lines for the transmission of the speaker image to a 42" plasma screen	512 kbps
(ii) Three ISDN lines for the transmission of the podium/room image to a 25" monitor	384 kbps
Total	**1 408 kbps**
(c) Satellite (when the two locations cannot be linked via ISDN)	4.85 MHz

When satellite service is involved, the need to use ISDN lines at the meeting location and/or at the servicing location depends on the proximity of the earth stations and on whether it is feasible or efficient to link them to the meeting place or to the interpreters' booths by hard wire.

56. Satellite links have proved to be reliable for remote interpretation purposes. The satellite capacity regularly available to the United Nations could make remote interpretation between Nairobi and New York financially viable, if part of the existing bandwidth is reassigned for this purpose. Other existing satellite links cover communications with the locations of peacekeeping missions and it is highly unlikely that these could be assigned to remote interpretation. Geneva and Vienna are not covered by the

Organization's satellite communications system. Since satellite services can be quite expensive, remote interpretation should not be considered if extra capacity has to be obtained commercially.

57. As was done in the report prepared after the first experiment (A/54/176), in order to have a very general picture of the comparative cost-effectiveness of each servicing modality, a comparison between the likely costs of daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for interpreters and of ISDN communications is given below for the venues of several forthcoming meetings. Information on DSA has been taken from the July 2001 circular issued by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC/CIRC/DSA/314). In order to obtain up-to-date information on ISDN rates, different vendors were contacted. The rates used below are the most favourable rates for global ISDN services from New York offered to the United Nations as at the date of the present report.

58. Since it is impossible to make assumptions about many servicing requirements, this very crude comparison assumes that any costs other than DSA and ISDN communications impacting either one of the terms of the equation would balance each other out. Savings in interpreters' travel expenses, for example, would be counterbalanced by additional costs, such as labour costs for technical set-ups, camera operators' salaries, the salary of conference room staff needed at the remote site, the cost of the transmission to interpreters of documents originating at the conference site, telephone traffic between the meeting and the interpreters and perhaps a number of incidentals impossible to foresee.

59. Paragraph 55 above shows that remote interpretation communications require 1,408 kbps, that is, 11 ISDN lines of 128 kbps each. Assuming that a two-week session is held, consisting of 20 three-hour meetings, each requiring a three-and-a-half-hour connection to allow for checking before the actual opening, ISDN links are needed for a total of 4,200 minutes. For the on-site servicing of a two-week session comprising 20 meetings, the presence of 20 interpreters would be needed. They would have to be paid DSA for 13 days. Kingston, Jamaica, is a frequent venue of meetings provided with on-site interpretation. The cost of one 128-kbps line from New York to Kingston is quoted at $1.71 per minute. Communications costs would amount in this case to $79,002. The current DSA for Kingston is $142. Total DSA would amount to $36,920. In this case, communications costs are more than double the cost of DSA.

60. The ratio between DSA and ISDN rates varies widely depending on the location of meetings. In the case of Kingston, it is 0.47 (36,920/79,002). In 2001 and 2002, meetings are being held or are likely to be held in 12 other cities in countries to which ISDN rates from New York are available. The corresponding DSA/ISDN ratios estimated as explained in paragraph 59 are as follows:

The Hague	1.73	Brussels	0.92
Geneva	1.42	Madrid	0.73
Vienna	1.21	Johannesburg	0.45
Berlin	1.18	Indonesia*	0.44
Santiago	1.16	Bangkok	0.36
Bonn	1.05	Durban	0.30

* Based on the Jakarta DSA. The specific venue is still to be determined.

61. A convenient rule of thumb could be that, when a direct comparison of DSA costs and communication costs indicates that the former are lower than the latter, prima facie there would be no reason to consider the use of remote interpretation. On the other hand, when communications costs are clearly lower than DSA, there could be financial reasons to consider the use of remote interpretation, subject to further analysis of the overall relevant costs under specific and well-defined servicing assumptions.

62. However, the combination of currently available technical and human resources does not provide a working environment sufficiently conducive to effective simultaneous interpretation. At the technical level, the second experiment revealed that there can be uncertainties and trade-offs between the volume of data transmitted via ISDN lines and the stability of the transmissions, with resulting limitations in the search for ever better visual information. At the human resources level, interpreters trained to work on-site cannot perform with the same efficiency when they work remotely.

63. In these circumstances, future activities that foster the accumulation of experience among interpreters working on-site at meetings which have some of the characteristics of remote meetings, namely

a videoconference component, will be of benefit. Future advances in the videoconferencing and communications areas must be continually assessed to determine whether they can offer solutions to the outstanding technical problems of remote interpretation. The potential financial advantages of remote interpretation in certain cases, together with the additional flexibility in the use of interpretation services that it can offer, justify further work along these lines.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/54/32), para. 61.

[2] See ibid., paras. 124 to 127.

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Fifty-sixth session
Item 110 of the provisional agenda*
Environment and sustainable development

Status of preparations for the International Year of Freshwater, 2003

Report of the Secretary-General** ***

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 55/196 of 20 December 2000, in which the Assembly proclaimed the year 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater; invited the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to serve as the coordinating entity for the Year and to develop relevant preliminary proposals for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on possible activities, including possible sources of funding, that could take place at all levels, as appropriate.

The report describes potential activities, initiatives and networking at the international, national and local levels and provides examples of fund-raising activities that could be undertaken at the international and national levels. It also explores issues that require greater attention during the Year and proposes further steps to be taken in preparation for it.

* A/56/150.

** The present report was delayed as preparations for the International Year of Freshwater only commenced in late June 2001.

*** The present report was prepared by the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in its capacity as the coordinating entity for the International Year of Freshwater. The status of the Subcommittee on Water Resources is currently under review as part of the reform of the machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination as a whole. The activities in support of the International Year of Freshwater will be carried out by relevant entities of the United Nations system in collaboration with Governments, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

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Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–3	3
II.	Background	4–7	3
III.	Institutional arrangements	8–10	4
IV.	International activities and initiatives	11–19	4
V.	Public information strategy	20–21	6
VI.	Public awareness activities	22–27	6
VII.	Other related publications	28	7
VIII.	Funding considerations	29–32	7
IX.	Some expected results	33	7
X.	Next steps	34	8

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 55/196 of 20 December 2000, the General Assembly proclaimed 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater; encouraged Member States, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of freshwater; and called upon Member States, national and international organizations, major groups and the private sector to make voluntary contributions in accordance with the guidelines for international years and anniversaries.

2. In resolution 55/196, the General Assembly invited the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to serve as the coordinating entity for the Year and to develop relevant preliminary proposals for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on possible activities, including possible sources of funding, that could take place at all levels, as appropriate.

3. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request. The Subcommittee on Water Resources has prepared the report in collaboration with its member United Nations entities and interested non-governmental organizations.

II. Background

4. Awareness of the importance of sustainable development, use and management of freshwater resources has increased in recent years, strongly supported by various ongoing international and national initiatives and activities. The most prominent framework is the broad-based effort to implement Agenda 21,[1] the programme of action adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and, in particular, its chapter 18, "Protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources: application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources". That policy framework was reconfirmed by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, in 1997, in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (resolution S-19/2, annex, paras. 34 and 35). The momentum gained at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development with regard to freshwater issues was further enhanced at the Expert Group Meeting on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management, held in Harare in 1998, and by the Commission on Sustainable Development by its decision 6/1, entitled "Strategic approaches to freshwater management".

5. Most recently, the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) contributed to the significance of and the ongoing momentum connected with the issue by explicitly addressing and formulating specific development targets with regard to freshwater issues. The General Assembly pledged to halve the number of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water by 2015 and to stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing appropriate water management strategies at all levels.

6. The decision of the General Assembly to proclaim 2003 the International Year of Freshwater provides a unique opportunity to consolidate and build upon the many efforts carried out to date to protect, use and manage freshwater resources in a sustainable manner. It allows for renewed and intensified commitment to continue such efforts at all levels. Yet the real challenge is to focus attention on action-oriented activities and policies that ensure long-term protection of available water quantity and quality and sustainability of water resource utilization, including sanitation. The International Year is also an opportunity to build on the ongoing momentum of international freshwater activities and to reinforce existing initiatives, including for the World Summit for Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002. Collective action is required to build and strengthen the institutional and human capacity to carry on with sustainable freshwater resource development and protection efforts far beyond 2003.

7. The present report provides proposals on the institutional framework of the preparations for the Year and describes some of the international and national activities that could be carried out in connection with it. Finally, the report gives an indication of activities that lie ahead in the period leading up to 2003 and makes some suggestions as to how to link them with ongoing and future events.

III. Institutional arrangements

8. At the institutional level, the member organizations of the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination are discussing organizational matters and substantive contributions related to preparations for the Year, including the adoption of a unifying theme for it. These will be further elaborated upon at the twenty-second session of the Subcommittee from 24 to 28 September 2001, at which the vision, the objectives and relative priority of activities as well as the division of labour among member organizations will be defined more clearly. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have both indicated their readiness to coordinate the preparation of the programme of activities for the Year on behalf of the Subcommittee on Water Resources.

9. In addition to the Subcommittee as inter-agency coordinating body, several other actors will be instrumental in preparing for the Year. National Governments, non-governmental organizations and professional associations are expected to play leading roles in that regard. Those actors will include, inter alia, bodies such as the World Water Council, the Global Water Partnership and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council.

10. As a follow-up to its original initiative for the International Year of Freshwater, the Government of Tajikistan has proposed to convene a focus group of interested countries, represented by their permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York, to support public awareness strategies.

IV. International activities and initiatives

11. Within the United Nations system, freshwater policy issues are dealt with by a number of different bodies. The International Year of Freshwater provides a welcome challenge to strengthen and expand existing networking efforts among United Nations bodies and concerned stakeholders at all levels. It offers an appropriate platform for promoting ongoing actions and policies, in particular within the work programmes of the five United Nations regional economic commissions with their close links to interregional, regional and national political authorities. The organization of national workshops for training purposes and awareness-raising among politicians, legislative bodies and other important governmental institutions will be considered.

12. In 2003, a major conference dedicated to freshwater issues, the Third World Water Forum, organized by the World Water Council and hosted by the Government of Japan, will be held in Kyoto, Japan. The meeting will bring together the world's leading scientists and water experts as well as representatives of Governments, local authorities and non-governmental organizations in order to exchange knowledge and share information. The coincidence of the International Year of Freshwater with the Third World Water Forum provides an opportunity for reciprocal promotion of and cooperation on freshwater issues. In addition, the International Year provides an excellent framework for continuous networking and promotion of activities at all levels related to the Third World Water Forum.

13. At its sixth session, in 1997, the Commission for Sustainable Development called on the United Nations system to undertake periodic assessments of the sustainable development, management, protection and use of freshwater resources and to provide a global picture of the state of freshwater resources and potential problems. To comply with that mandate, the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 1998 launched the World Water Development Report. From that concept evolved the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) as an inter-agency initiative under the oversight of the Subcommittee, coordinated by the WWAP secretariat and hosted by UNESCO. WWAP will provide the background assessment for the World Water Development Report and both will contribute essential information and data with which to launch proposals on ways to conserve and manage water resources.

14. The World Water Development Report is the central product of the WWAP and is intended to be a comprehensive and scientific biennial report on the state of global freshwater resources. A first draft will be presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, and the first edition will be available at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto in

2003. Both presentations will ensure broad-based public and scientific attention and will enhance awareness of the International Year for Freshwater. The publication of the first edition in 2003 will be a milestone and will represent a major scientific contribution of the United Nations system to research on freshwater issues. It has already attracted considerable attention and expectation among researchers and water experts. The promotion of the World Water Development Report will be a major focus of the Year's public information activities. Additional and related scientific and political events, exhibits and conferences on freshwater issues will be linked and included in all promotional activities regarding the launch of the Report.

15. WWAP is supplemented, among other efforts, by the ongoing Global International Waters Assessment, coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and funded by the Global Environment Facility. The Global International Waters Assessment is based at Kalmar University in Sweden and is supported by a broad range of scientific institutions and non-governmental organizations, which provide a useful network of contacts for the activities of the International Year.

16. The first edition of the World Water Development Report will concentrate on water in Africa as its special theme. Several United Nations agencies and special initiatives are running projects and programmes dedicated to African policy issues with emphasis on freshwater. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has a long-standing technical cooperation programme for integrated water resource management in the region. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and UNEP are jointly organizing an initiative entitled "Managing Water for African Cities" and the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa has agreed on main priorities that coincide with those established in the World Water Development Report. Improved networking and policy coherence among these and other United Nations initiatives and activities focusing on freshwater issues will be sought and enhanced. Those mechanisms will be further expanded to promote widely the Year's activities with regard to freshwater issues in Africa.

17. The sustainable use and management of transboundary rivers and lakes has many political implications and presents many challenges to efforts aimed at conflict resolution. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and other United Nations entities collaborate closely and seek complementarity in support of management of transboundary fresh and marine water resources. A recently established UNDP/World Bank International Water Partnership has the Nile River Basin as its initial area of collaboration. The objective is to ensure close cooperation in supporting the riparian States in the sustainable and equitable development of the Nile River. The close partnership between UNDP and the World Bank and the extension of that partnership to include other multilateral and bilateral agencies is an imperative for achieving equitable utilization and shared benefit of common resources. Such partnerships will be actively publicized and supported during the International Year of Freshwater.

18. The secretariats of the related United Nations conventions (the Convention on Biological Diversity,[2] the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa[3] and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change),[4] and the 1971 Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat ("the Ramsar Convention") will be invited to make the information materials and brochures on the International Year of Freshwater available to their parties through their respective clearing-house mechanisms, as appropriate, with links from their respective web sites to the official web site for the Year.

19. Policy networks at the international and national levels combine a broad-based multi-stakeholder approach with successful dissemination of information at all levels. For example, the ongoing dialogue on water, food and environment is a joint initiative among pivotal international actors such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNEP, the World Health Organization, the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the World Water Council and the Global Water Partnership. The dialogue, convened by the International Water Management Institute, is intended to develop a global consensus among key stakeholders from the irrigation, environment and rural development communities on the role of future water needs in relation to food production and nature in developing countries. Future

meetings and related activities will be linked to and will promote the Year and related actions.

V. Public information strategy

20. Developing and strengthening collaboration, cooperation and exchange of information in preparing for and implementing the International Year of Freshwater is an important and crucial task. Through collaboration between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, and in cooperation with various Governments and non-governmental organizations, a public information strategy will be formulated. The Subcommittee on Water Resources will work closely with the Joint United Nations Information Committee to prepare adequate information and media kits covering the Year and to disseminate such information at all levels. The public information and media strategy will include the preparation and presentation of an official logo for the Year; information materials, brochures and press kits; educational materials for schools; videotapes and documentaries; as well as an official web site. Initial brainstorming and preparatory meetings on public information strategies and fund-raising opportunities have been organized.

21. The sustainable use and management of water resources has to be viewed in relationship to other United Nations initiatives and events, such as international years. The International Year of the Mountains in 2002 and the International Year of Ecotourism also in 2002 include activities aimed at the protection of natural resources in general and water-related aspects in particular. The Subcommittee on Water Resources will work closely with the programme managers for the international years being observed in 2002.

VI. Public awareness activities

22. In recent years, freshwater issues have received increasing political attention and have been put high on the international agenda. The remarkable number of past and future international and national conferences on freshwater issues is evidence of the current momentum. Such events provide excellent opportunities to promote the International Year of Freshwater far ahead of 2003. The public information strategy for the Year will take advantage of those events by putting the Year on the agenda of important conferences, such as the following:

(a) Annual Stockholm Water Symposium, 12-18 August 2001;

(b) Interregional Symposium on Water-related Disaster Reduction and Response, Bangkok, 27-31 August, 2001;

(c) Twenty-second session of the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, Geneva, 24-28 September 2001;

(d) International Conference on Freshwater, Bonn, 3-7 December 2001, hosted by the Government of Germany;

(e) World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2002;

(f) Third World Water Forum, Kyoto, Japan, March 2003, organized by the World Water Council and hosted by the Government of Japan.

23. Several far-reaching initiatives that aim at increasing public awareness and providing key information on freshwater-related topics will be prepared in cooperation with non-profit organizations. Those initiatives could include, inter alia, the dissemination of messages related to management, conservation and protection of freshwater through educational exhibits at museums; public television and radio; documentary movies; children's books; and school curricula. The possibility of creating an International Year of Freshwater prize, aimed at awarding outstanding initiatives in the promotion of freshwater awareness, is being explored with possible donors.

24. The South Street Seaport Museum in New York, in partnership with the television production company Swynk Productions, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, is planning to prepare an educational exhibit in celebration of the International Year of Freshwater. Using Swynk footage and spokespersons, the exhibit will focus on the complexity of the freshwater crisis and the global imperative for solutions through policy review and revision, governance, conservation and innovative technology.

25. The exhibit could be designed in a travelling format for circulation to museums around the world. It

is expected to be accompanied by a catalogue of educational activities for curriculum adaptation by local educators with audio-visual components. A 6-hour television documentary, created by Swynk, was produced for the Public Broadcasting System and was broadcast in the United States; a 13 1/2-hour series was produced for European television. Through network contacts with the International Council of Museums, the International Congress of Maritime Museums, and other public and private organizations, the South Street Seaport Museum/Swynk partnership could market the exhibit and its programmes to maritime museums, natural history museums, aquariums and other educational institutions as a strategy to advance public awareness of critical freshwater issues internationally.

26. Television and radio broadcasting present powerful and far-reaching public awareness and communication channels. In cooperation with selected television production companies, such as Swynk, it is envisaged that the United Nations could produce and broadcast a number of television features and documentaries as well as educational materials to celebrate the year-long event.

27. The non-governmental Gender and Water Alliance, based in the Netherlands at the International Water and Sanitation Centre, in close cooperation with the secretariat of the Third World Water Forum and the Global Water Partnership as well as several interested donor countries, is producing a series of children's books on water issues. The objective of the project is to raise the level of awareness of children and teachers about water issues: the books may be used for educational purposes in schools and will be sold in bookstores worldwide. The launch of the book series is scheduled for early spring 2003 prior to the Third World Water Forum and will be used to promote the Year.

VII. Other related publications

28. Several important United Nations journals and other publications that provide crucial information on freshwater issues could be used for promotion of the Year. The UNEP Global Environment Outlook Report being prepared for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 will focus on the state of regional and global water resources as well as on responses to the threats to them. Special issues of *Natural Resources Forum*, the *Natural Resources Newsletter*, the *International Rivers and Lakes* newsletter and the *WMO Bulletin* are expected to be issued in conjunction with the Year during 2003.

VIII. Funding considerations

29. Freshwater issues are a concern for all. Fund-raising appeals for the International Year of Freshwater will therefore be addressed to all stakeholders, such as Governments, non-governmental organizations and private foundations. Because of their increasing political importance, freshwater activities have received improved financial support in recent years from a variety of sources. A number of possible donor countries are actively involved in promoting the sustainable use and management of freshwater resources. Appeals will be made for funds to those countries and other potential donors.

30. Support will also be sought from public foundations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. An international art competition and auction with paintings of freshwater subjects is being considered by private donors to raise money for water-related projects in developing countries. Merchandizing licensed products such as compact discs and T-shirts with the Year's logo and theme is also being considered. Benefit concerts organized by public foundations, with support from the private sector and non-governmental organizations, have been proposed to raise funds for projects in developing countries.

31. It is expected that the United Nations system could contribute to fund raising through a variety of means and projects, including the production and sale of United Nations stamps with reference to freshwater themes.

32. Proceeds from fund raising could be used primarily to raise awareness of and improve educational programmes about water resource conservation and management in developing countries upon request during the International Year of Freshwater.

IX. Some expected results

33. The International Year of Freshwater should provide an opportunity to initiate processes that advance issues of sustainable water resource

development and management far beyond 2003. The Year should follow a participatory approach and involve the whole range of relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, it should:

(a) Increase awareness about the importance of water resources for human life and nature, as well as the necessity of sustainable approaches to water resource development and management;

(b) Generate long-term research and development projects initiated to address critical water resource issues, such as efficient use and allocation of scarce and shared water resources and increased understanding of aquatic ecosystems;

(c) Facilitate the development of appropriate policies for sustainable development and management of water resources at the international and national levels;

(d) Increase the number of local activities aimed at improving livelihood opportunities. Those activities should stress participatory approaches and could be targeted towards vulnerable groups, such as women, children, low-income groups, indigenous people and people in dry-land areas.

X. Next steps

34. The next important steps are to continue working along the lines of the present report and to develop further the strong water resource links between entities of the United Nations system, Governments, the private sector and civil society. A key meeting for further discussions on possible theme, funding, expected outcomes and division of labour will be the twenty-second session of the Subcommittee on Water Resources in September 2001. A progress report will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on Biological Diversity (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1954, No. 33480.

[4] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

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Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Human rights and terrorism

Report of the Secretary-General**

1. In its resolution 54/164 of 17 December 1999, recalling its previous resolutions on human rights and terrorism and those of the Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on the same subject, the General Assembly reiterated its unequivocal condemnation of the acts, methods and practices of terrorism; and called upon States to take all necessary and effective measures in accordance with relevant provisions of international law, including international human rights standards, to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, wherever and by whomever committed.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to seek the views of Member States on the implications of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, for the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, with a view to incorporating them into his report to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

3. The present report, submitted pursuant to that request, summarizes the replies received from the Governments that responded to the note verbale by the Secretary-General dated 4 September 2000, namely, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar and Turkey. Also covered are replies to the note verbale dated 16 August 1999 that were not included in the previous report (A/54/439), namely, those received from Cuba, India and the United Arab Emirates.

Azerbaijan

4. The Government of Azerbaijan provided information regarding terrorist activities against it, which had also appeared in its letters dated 9 April 1997 and 7 January 1999 to the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/1997/138 and E/CN.4/1999/117) and its letter dated 27 July 1999 to the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/39). It recognized that international terrorism posed an extremely serious threat to the universally recognized concept of human rights and fundamental freedoms in addition to the threat to the security and territorial integrity of States. The Government made it clear that the majority of terrorist acts were in fact organized and their consequences exacerbated by the involvement of other States. The Government of Azerbaijan welcomed the work of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and terrorism of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and expressed its hope that

* A/56/150.

** The present report is being submitted on 17 July 2001 so as to include as much updated information as possible.

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the Special Rapporteur's subsequent reports would give more attention to the phenomenon of so-called "ethnic terrorism" and the role of diasporas in the support of international terrorism as a means of undermining the territorial integrity of States. Azerbaijan said it was convinced of the need to strengthen international cooperation to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism and expressed the belief that the development of an overarching and comprehensive international legal instrument to that end was an important priority. It expressed its readiness to play an active role in drafting and discussing an appropriate draft international convention.

5. Azerbaijan also provided information on different aspects of its national anti-terrorist legislation. An Anti-Terrorist Act had been adopted on 18 June 1999, setting out the legal and organizational underpinnings of anti-terrorist measures, coordinating the work of public bodies engaged in the fight against terrorism, and describing the rights and duties of those bodies and of citizens. The Azerbaijani Criminal Code, which came into force on 1 September 2000, criminalizes the following acts: terrorism, defined as the commission of acts (or threat to commit such acts) that would result in carnage, bodily harm or other injury to health, destruction (damage) of property or other serious consequences. The acts in question must be calculated to endanger public safety, sow panic among the population or compel public bodies to take decisions that serve terrorist interests or the interest of those threatening to commit such acts (art. 214.1); the same acts carried out by a defined group of persons organized in advance for the purpose of committing the act (art. 214.2); and the same acts when committed by a group and resulting in the death of the victim (art. 214.3). Other provisions in the law make punishable the wanton dissemination of misinformation regarding the death of persons, significant damage to property and other socially dangerous acts connected with a planned explosion as well as the attempt on the life of a public servant or government employee in order to curtail his political activity or as revenge for such activity. The Government of Azerbaijan noted that any person involved in the planning of a terrorist act who informed the authorities of the planned act in advance or helped to avert the offence by some other means was exempted from all criminal liability, provided that he had committed no other crime.

Cuba

6. The Government of Cuba condemned all terrorist acts in all their forms and manifestations as well as State involvement in supporting or tolerating such acts against other States. Without prejudice to international jurisprudence on the matter, the Government observed that Cuba regarded terrorism as a grave threat to the enjoyment of all human rights and stated that Cuba had been the victim of violent and varied terrorist practices over the last four decades. It denounced those activities as organized by foreign-based terrorist groups.

7. The Government of Cuba recognized the importance of State action, at both the national and international level, in the fight to prevent and eliminate terrorism as an obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights, but underlined the need for the international community to act with transparency and without applying double standards. Cuba observed that the conclusion and implementation of international treaties was an important element in the fight against terrorism, but the progressive development of international law in the fight against terrorism was not in itself a guarantee of success. Cuba provided information on actions and measures that it had taken to fight against terrorism and to cooperate for that purpose. Cuba's Penal Code characterized terrorism and related acts as criminal offences and provided for penalties commensurate with the gravity of the offences. Cuba expressed the view that international action to combat terrorism should include cooperation with other States in apprehending perpetrators and in ensuring that no terrorist acts against other States were prepared or tolerated on their territory.

Egypt

8. The Government of Egypt provided information on measures it had taken in different fields to limit and eliminate terrorism. At the political level, the Government pointed out that the 1977 Political Parties Regulatory Act No. 40, which guaranteed the right of citizens to express their opinion through legitimate channels, had helped to eliminate clandestine organizations that were seeking to become focal points for extremists. In the legislative field, in line with United Nations documents and resolutions, the Egyptian legislature had endeavoured to combat terrorist crimes while ensuring that statutory legal safeguards were applied when suspected terrorists were called to account. Article 86 of the Penal Code, as

modified by Act No. 97 of 1992, defined terrorism as any use of force, violence, threats or intimidation to which an offender resorted to put into effect an individual or collective criminal plan designed to disrupt public order or endanger public safety and security by harming or terrorizing persons, jeopardizing their lives, freedoms and security, damaging the environment, damaging or seizing control of communications, preventing or obstructing the functioning of public authorities, houses of worship or academic institutions or rendering the Constitution, the laws or regulations inoperative. The Penal Code prescribed heavier penalties for terrorist crimes. In the social field, Egypt stated that it had endeavoured to improve the living conditions of the residents in shanty towns in order to prevent them from supporting, or falling under control of, terrorist groups. It had also sought to reduce unemployment by encouraging small enterprises funded through soft loans from the Social Fund and major investment in the country. In the cultural field, the countrywide "Reading for All" project made low-price books and publications available to ordinary citizens with a view to improving their cultural and intellectual levels. In the security field, the Government continued its action to investigate and bring to justice terrorist organizations as well as its endeavours to promote discussions between leading intellectuals and religious ministers and terrorist groups. Finally, in the educational field, Egypt had developed an academic curriculum to teach young persons the principles of human rights and the manner in which citizens should treat persons of different gender, colour or beliefs in conformity with the principles of the Islamic sharia.

India

9. The Government of India recognized that terrorism was a major challenge that confronted the international community and posed one of the most serious threats to human rights, violated the most fundamental right of all, the right to life, and infringed upon all others. It also expressed its complete agreement with the provisions of the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism (resolution 50/53, annex). India pointed to the urgent need for a comprehensive study on the impact of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights, in view of the continuing acts of terrorism despite international and national efforts, and the still confused and inconclusive debate on the issue. Terrorism had serious adverse consequences for the enjoyment of all human rights and was totally at odds with democratic and liberal society. There was an urgent need to ensure the accountability of non-State actors who perpetrated terrorist acts. Observing the growing number of non-State actors who were responsible for massive abuses of human rights, the Government of India expressed its disagreement with those who maintained that it was only States that violated human rights. In its view the current imbalance, which failed to address the abuses perpetrated by terrorist individuals or groups and placed undue emphasis on the human rights of terrorists while ignoring the gross violation of human rights of others by them, needed to be redressed.

10. The Government of India also observed that a sustained campaign of terrorist violence was not possible without assistance from States, who used it as an instrument of foreign policy. The existing international conventions on terrorism tended to concentrate on individual responsibility and did not address the problem of State responsibility or cover inadequately the obligation of the States to prevent and refrain from aiding and abetting terrorist acts. The Government also noted a linkage between drugs and terrorism, and cited, in that connection, General Assembly resolution 52/133 of 12 December 1997 and the Annual Opium Poppy Survey published by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. Finally, recognizing that India had been the victim of acts of terrorism, the Government of India reaffirmed its commitment to fight against it with full respect to democratic norms of the Indian Constitution and international human rights standards and expressed its willingness to promote the international community's efforts to develop a common approach to combat terrorism, including a comprehensive convention.

Kuwait

11. The Government of Kuwait stated that terrorism, regardless of its type, form and source, constituted a serious crime against and a grave violation of human rights. While recognizing that the phenomenon of terrorism had been present for centuries, the Government stressed the unprecedented characteristics that the phenomenon had taken on during the past four decades, spreading across borders, threatening the foundations of friendly relations among States and sowing seeds of evil and hatred between peoples. Kuwait emphasized that one of the main difficulties

that might impede achievement of the goals of international cooperation to curb and eliminate terrorism lay in the international community's failure to date to agree on a standard and universally acceptable definition of the concept of international terrorism. However, it expressed its belief that those difficulties should under no circumstances preclude diligent and sincere endeavours to increasingly curb and minimize the spread of the phenomenon. Kuwait had repeatedly emphasized its condemnation of the phenomenon and called for the closest possible international collaboration to eliminate it and its consequences and to safeguard everyone's right to enjoy his or her full human rights and freedoms.

12. The Government of Kuwait pointed out that the country had been the victim of terrorist incidents and attacks, which had assumed a wide variety of forms and methods, including hijacking of aircraft, bombings at public and private places, installations and facilities, attempted assassinations of important personalities and diplomats and other terrorist acts.

13. The Government of Kuwait also provided information on a series of legal, practical and other measures that it had taken, including accession to international conventions, promotion of forms of international cooperation through bilateral agreements, support for regional endeavours and, at the internal level, measures to develop its national legislation and regulations. Among the international conventions acceded to by Kuwait were conventions concerning the safety of aircraft, safety of persons and marking and detection of explosives. Kuwait had also supported, or endorsed, all resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the subject of international terrorism. At the regional level, Kuwait had supported the endeavours of regional organizations by signing the Arab Agreement on the Prevention of Terrorism of 1998, the aim of which was to promote joint regional endeavours among Arab States to combat terrorist crimes that threatened security and stability in those States. It had also supported the resolutions adopted by the ministerial councils of the Organization of the Islamic Conference concerning measures to combat air piracy and had sponsored the resolution adopted at the Fifth Islamic Summit Conference, held in Kuwait in January 1987, on measures to combat all types and forms of international terrorism. At the bilateral level, the Government of Kuwait had concluded bilateral agreements with other States in the field of civil aviation incorporating provisions concerning the safety of aircraft. At the internal level, Kuwait had taken a series of legislative and regulatory measures, the most notable of which was the promulgation of Act No. 6 of 1994 concerning crimes against the safety of aircraft and aviation. Those measures were being accorded priority by the competent state agencies, which, in turn, took practical and executive measures, including action to combat terrorism, as well as endeavours in the field of training, information and public awareness. In the area of combating terrorism, Kuwait had established specialized bodies to deal with the phenomenon in the areas of protection of aircraft, security of installations, protection of prominent personalities, counter-terrorism, explosives and passports. Kuwait also assigned training, information and public awareness an important role in minimizing the danger of terrorism. In that context, it had carried out specialized training of counter-terrorism personnel and had established coordination with the security agencies of other Arab and friendly States through the organization of joint meetings, symposia and lectures. To conclude, the Government of Kuwait reaffirmed its intention to continue its endeavours in all fields as well as its willingness to cooperate with the international community with a view to the final elimination and eradication of the phenomenon of terrorism.

Qatar

14. The Government of Qatar indicated that it had no studies or publications on the subject matter of the note verbale.

Turkey

15. The Government of Turkey expressed its full support for the idea that terrorism was not only a criminal phenomenon and the fight against it was not merely a problem of crime control. In that regard it welcomed the fact that that approach was reflected in the preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Turkey believed that acts of terror violated human rights and fundamental freedoms; thus there was a direct link between combating terrorism and the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It stated that individuals and groups also had responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights and could violate them. The conventional human rights approach, as shaped by the

events of the Second World War, was inadequate in responding to developments in the field. The concept of human rights was not static but had evolved as a result of the rapid social change in the post-war period, with increased responsibility being assigned to non-state actors and, on the other hand, a reduction of the State's functions in society. Turkey submitted that it must be accepted that individuals and groups also violated human rights, the role of terrorist groups in violation of human rights could be cited as an example.

United Arab Emirates

16. The Government of the United Arab Emirates provided information about provisions in its Constitution that guaranteed rights and opportunities for individuals and families. Those provisions also guaranteed public freedoms, rights and duties to secure for every human being the right to life without exposure to harm or danger. The Government stated that national legislation had followed the approach of the Constitution, which was in keeping with their common source in the Islamic sharia law. It observed that Islamic sharia law aimed at the prevention of terrorism and all of its manifestations and that the Holy Koran had determined that it should be punished as a crime that threatened the security, stability and prosperity of society. The Government also stated that terrorism was a form of direct assault on society and a means of creating instability and insecurity. Terrorism was more an assault on the fundamental nature and structural components of society than an assault on individuals. Finally, the Government described the implications of terrorism as twofold: it affected individuals by depriving them of their natural rights as prescribed by religion and law and also affected society by creating instability and disrupting safety and security.

17. The full texts of the replies received are available for consultation in the files of the Secretariat.

United Nations A/56/191

General Assembly

Distr.: General
30 July 2001
English
Original: Arabic

Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

Observer status for the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States in the General Assembly

Letter dated 24 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Observer status for the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States". The Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) is an intergovernmental organization with 16 members (Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, the Gambia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, the Niger, Senegal, Somalia, the Sudan and Tunisia).

Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, this request is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum and a related draft resolution (see annexes I and II).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed **Erwa**
Permanent Representative

01-47320 (E) 030801 030801

Annex I to the letter dated 24 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Explanatory memorandum

Community of Sahelo-Saharan States

I. General overview

1. The Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) was established on 4 February 1998 by a conference held in Tripoli, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, of the leaders and heads of State of Burkina Faso, Chad, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, the Niger and the Sudan.

2. The Central African Republic, Djibouti, Eritrea, the Gambia and Senegal joined the Community at the conference of heads of State of CEN-SAD held in N'Djamena, Chad, on 4 and 5 February 2000.

3. At the third regular session of the CEN-SAD Council of Heads of State, held in Khartoum on 12 and 13 February 2001, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia and Tunisia also joined the Community.

II. Purposes and principles

4. The preamble to the Treaty establishing the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States affirms the determination of the States members of CEN-SAD to satisfy the wish for economic, cultural, political and social integration in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the 1991 Abuja Treaty and the constitutive documents of the regional organizations to which its member States belong.

5. Article 1 of the Treaty establishing the Community refers to the establishment of an overall economic union based on the implementation of a strategy by means of development plans that are complementary to the national development plans of member States and that include investment in the agricultural, industrial, social and cultural fields and in energy, and it looks towards the financial future of the Community with every confidence.

6. All obstacles to unity among member States are to be eliminated by:

(a) Facilitating the free movement of persons and capital and promoting the interests of the citizens of member States;

(b) Ensuring freedom of residence, employment, ownership and economic activity;

(c) Ensuring the free movement of goods and commodities of local origin as well as of services.

7. External trade is to be stimulated by the formulation and implementation of an investment policy for member States.

8. Increased provision is to be made for surface, air and maritime transport links between member States through the implementation of joint projects.

9. Member States are to reach agreement on giving citizens of other member States the same rights, privileges and duties as their own, in accordance with their respective constitutions.

10. Educational systems at all levels are to be harmonized and there is to be coordination in the cultural, scientific and technical fields.

III. Organs

11. In order to promote the purposes and principles proclaimed by member States, article 4 of the CEN-SAD Treaty establishes the following organs:

(a) The **Council of Heads of State**, consisting of the leaders and heads of State of the Community. It has supreme authority over the various institutions and makes decisions relating to general policy for the implementation of the Treaty and the achievement of its objectives. It approves the decisions of the other organs and provides them with guidance in the implementation of its own decisions, and it decides the matters referred to it by the Executive Council and the Secretariat. It issues the decisions, regulations and instructions necessary to achieve the goals and implement the programmes of the Community. The Council of Heads of State meets once a year and its presidency rotates among the capitals of member States. It may hold extraordinary meetings at the request of any of its members;

(b) The **Executive Council**, consisting of a number of ministers (or secretaries of General People's Committees) from member States. The Council formulates the complementary programmes and plans, implements the decisions of the Council of Heads of State, and prepares for the sessions of the latter and, in cooperation with the Secretariat, draws up its provisional agenda. It gives effect to the conclusions and recommendations of the special ministerial councils and submits them to the Council of Heads of State for approval;

(c) The **Secretariat**, whose functions and seat are to be determined by the Council of Heads of State. It is entrusted with the task of monitoring the achievement of the objectives set by the Executive Council and supervising the work of its institutions;

(d) The **Development Bank**, whose functions will be determined by the Executive Council;

(e) The **Economic, Social and Cultural Council**, whose functions will be determined by the Executive Council.

12. Under its article 5, the Treaty was to enter into force on the date of its ratification by the signatory States in accordance with their respective procedures.

IV. International relations

13. The Community will endeavour to establish a comprehensive network of relationships within the international community. At the thirty-sixth session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, held in Lomé in July 2000, the Community was granted the status of a regional economic grouping.

14. CEN-SAD has concluded partnership and cooperation agreements with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel.

V. Benefits of observer status for the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States in the General Assembly

15. The CEN-SAD Council of Heads of State has taken note with satisfaction the partnership and cooperation agreements mentioned in section IV above and has requested the Secretary-General of the Community to pursue a policy of outreach and of practical partnership with regional economic groupings, intergovernmental organizations and corporations in Africa or elsewhere in order to bolster the Community's activities for the enhancement of economic and social development.

16. In this light, observer status for the Community in the General Assembly would greatly enhance future cooperation and ensure more effective results. For both organizations, observer status for CEN-SAD would enhance and strengthen their efforts in the economic development fields.

Annex II to the letter dated 24 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Draft resolution

Observer status for the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States in the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Considering the importance of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States, an intergovernmental organization that addresses the common interests of its members and takes account of the divers links that unite their peoples, and given its determination to confront the factors that have caused economic backwardness and instability in its member States, its conviction that joint action in a framework of complementarity is the best way to integrate its countries and peoples, its commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Sahelo-Saharan region, and its determination to satisfy the wish for economic, cultural, political and social integration in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the Organization of African Unity, the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the 1991 Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (Abuja Treaty) and the constitutive documents of the regional organizations to which its member States belong,

Considering also the need, frequently noted by the United Nations, to promote and support every effort towards the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the basis of international law,

Noting that the Treaty establishing the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States stresses regional cooperation as part of the process of achieving African unity on the basis of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the promotion of social justice and stability,

Wishing to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States,

1. *Decides* to invite the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States to participate in the sessions and work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to implement the present resolution.

United Nations A/56/192

General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 August 2001
English
Original: French

Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

International convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings

Letter dated 7 August 2001 from the Chargés d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Missions of France and Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We have the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "International convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings".

In view of the multidisciplinary nature and legal complexities of the issue, we believe it would be appropriate to allocate the item to the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly.

Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure, this request is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum and a related draft resolution (see annexes I and II).

(*Signed*) Yves **Doutriaux**

(*Signed*) Hanns **Schumacher**

01-50270 (E) 090801 090801

Annex I to the letter dated 7 August 2001 from the Chargés d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Missions of France and Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Explanatory memorandum

Within the general issue of biotechnological advances which open up prospects as regards health and also give rise to new ethical issues, the announcement by certain laboratories and researchers that they intend to proceed in the near future with reproductive cloning of human beings poses a particularly serious problem in terms of human dignity and identity and calls for an urgent initiative. While it is true that, at present, only a small number of researchers or scientific institutions have the technical capacity to perform such operations, there is no doubt that such operations would have an impact on the entire human family. It should be recalled, in this connection, that article 11 of the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights drawn up by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 53/152 states that "Practices which are contrary to human dignity, such as reproductive cloning of human beings, shall not be permitted".

It is in answer to this challenge that France and Germany are proposing an initiative to engage, within the universal context of the United Nations, negotiations on an international legal instrument banning the reproductive cloning of human beings. These negotiations must be open to all States and to the participation of specialized agencies, in particular UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO). Moreover, such negotiations should benefit in due course, from the relevant work of the group of independent experts called for by the Commission on Human Rights[a] to reflect on the possible follow-up to the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights.

Because of its multidisciplinary nature the issue could not be dealt with in all its aspects in any of the specialized agencies (such as the Commission on Human Rights, UNESCO, WHO) and it therefore falls within the competence of the General Assembly. Within the General Assembly, it is the Sixth Committee which seems the most suited to conduct negotiations on elaborating a legally binding instrument which will, no doubt, pose complex legal and technical problems. The French-German initiative deliberately focuses on a specific aspect of a larger debate, in regard to which the necessary coherence should be maintained, regardless of the forum in which it is discussed.

In view of the complex nature of this subject, it would be preferable to take a two-step approach. Thus, it is suggested that the General Assembly adopt a resolution at its fifty-sixth session whereby it would decide to open negotiations on an international legal instrument banning the reproductive cloning of human beings and establishing, for this purpose, an open-ended ad hoc committee of the Sixth Committee responsible, initially, for defining a negotiation mandate and, subsequently, for conducting the negotiations. It is hoped that the draft mandate prepared by the ad hoc committee could be adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session so that the negotiation of the future instrument could begin in 2003.

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[a] Commission resolution 2001/71 of 25 April 2001 (adopted by consensus), para. 4.

Annex II to the letter dated 7 August 2001 from the Chargés d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Missions of France and Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Draft resolution

International convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings

The General Assembly,

Recalling the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, adopted in 1997 by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and particularly its article 11, which specifies that "Practices (...) such as reproductive cloning of human beings shall not be permitted" and invites States and international organizations to cooperate in "taking, at national or international level, the measures necessary" in that regard,

Recalling also its resolution 53/152 of 9 December 1998, by which it endorsed the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights,

Bearing in mind Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/71, entitled "Human rights and bioethics", adopted at the Commission's fifty-seventh session,

Aware that the rapid development of the life sciences opens up tremendous prospects for the improvement of the health of individuals and mankind as a whole, but also that certain practices may pose dangers to the integrity and dignity of the individual,

Particularly concerned, in this regard, about recently disclosed information on the research being conducted with a view to the reproductive cloning of human beings,

Determined to prevent such an attack on the dignity of the individual,

Aware of the need for a multidisciplinary approach to the elaboration, by the international community, of an appropriate response to this problem,

1. *Decides* to establish, within the Sixth Committee, an ad hoc committee open to all States Members of the United Nations or of specialized agencies and to the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization, for the purpose of elaborating an international convention banning the reproductive cloning of human beings;

2. *Requests* the ad hoc committee to prepare, to this end, a mandate for the negotiation of such an international convention, including, inter alia, a list of the existing international instruments to be taken into consideration and a list of legal issues to be addressed in the convention;

3. *Decides* that, during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, the ad hoc committee shall hold two one-week sessions, with the understanding that the first session will open with an exchange of information and technical assessments, with the participation of experts on genetics and bioethics;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide the ad hoc committee with the resources it needs to discharge its responsibility;

5. *Also requests* the ad hoc committee to report to the General Assembly, at its fifty-seventh session, on its work in relation to the negotiation mandate;

6. *Decides* that the ad hoc committee shall open negotiations on the international convention as soon as the negotiation mandate has been adopted by the General Assembly;

7. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-seventh session an item entitled "International convention against the reproductive cloning of human beings".

United Nations A/56/193

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

Need to examine the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan, to ensure that the fundamental right of its twenty-three million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations is fully respected

Letter dated 8 August 2001 from the representatives of Belize, Burkina Faso, Chad, Dominica, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nicaragua, Palau, Senegal and Tuvalu to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon the instructions of our respective Governments, we have the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of a supplementary item entitled "Need to examine the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan, to ensure that the fundamental right of its twenty-three million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations is fully respected". Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, we attach an explanatory memorandum (see annex I) and a draft resolution (see annex II).

(*Signed*) Stuart W. **Leslie**
Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Michel **Kafando**
Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Koumtog **Laoteggueinodji**
Permanent Representative of Chad to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Simon Paul **Richards**
Permanent Representative of Dominica to the United Nations

01-50538 (E) 130801

(*Signed*) Jose Roberto **Andino Salazar**
Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Baboucarr-Blaise Ismaila **Jagne**
Permanent Representative of the Gambia to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Eduardo J. **Sevilla Somoza**
Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Rhinehart **Silas**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Embassy of Palau to the United States of America

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Enele S. **Sopoaga**
Permanent Representative of Tuvalu to the United Nations

Annex I to the letter dated 8 August 2001 from the representatives of Belize, Burkina Faso, Chad, Dominica, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nicaragua, Palau, Senegal and Tuvalu to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Explanatory memorandum

The Republic of China on Taiwan is the only aspiring country that remains excluded from the United Nations after the admission of Tuvalu to the United Nations in 2000. Today, for the following reasons, there is an urgent need to examine this situation and to redress this mistaken omission.

1. **The Republic of China is a democratic country and its democratically elected government is the sole legitimate one that can actually represent the interests and wishes of the people of Taiwan in the United Nations.**

The Republic of China and the People's Republic of China have coexisted on their respective sides of the Taiwan Strait, with neither subject to the other's rule for decades. Over that past half-century, each side has developed its own political system, social values and foreign relations. Therefore, each of these two sides can speak for and represent only the people actually under its jurisdiction on its respective side of the Taiwan Strait. Contrary to some claims, the People's Republic of China has never exercised any control over Taiwan since 1949.

2. **The exclusion of the Republic of China from the United Nations and its related agencies has created a major and serious obstacle for both the Government and the people of the Republic of China in their pursuit of their fundamental right to participate in international organizations and activities.**

From 1950 to 1971, the United Nations considered the question of China's representation. In October 1971, at its twenty-sixth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2758 (XXVI), in which it was decided that the China seat would be taken by the People's Republic of China. That resolution, however, failed to address the issue of legitimate representation for the people of Taiwan in the United Nations.

Worse still, the above-mentioned resolution has often been invoked to deter the participation of individuals and non-governmental groups of Taiwan in United Nations activities and all activities related to the functions of the Economic and Social Council. This unjust exclusion of the Republic of China's civil associations and individuals runs counter to the predominant trend of involving all possible participants in international affairs.

The principle of universality, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, demonstrates that the United Nations is open to all States regardless of their size and population; all are welcome to participate and their rights must be guaranteed. In recent years, the United Nations has expanded its functions to include the respect for human rights, advocacy of freedom, realization of democracy, cooperation on economic and social development, humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations. However, with all the United Nations achievements in realizing the principle of universality, there is still one country left uncovered by this principle.

The involuntary absence of the Republic of China in United Nations activities poses an irony to the United Nations principle of universality.

3. The Republic of China, a country with significant achievements, is a constructive and responsible member of the international community.

The Republic of China, with a population of 23 million, has played a positive role in entrenching democracy, promoting world trade, eradicating poverty and advancing human rights, a fact that merits recognition by States Members of the United Nations. Above all, it is a peace-loving country, which is able and willing to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Republic of China held its first direct presidential election in March 1996, the first time in history that the Republic elected its highest leader by popular vote. In March 2000, Mr. Chen Shuibian of the Democratic Progressive Party was elected in the second direct presidential election, marking the first-ever change of political parties for the presidency of the Republic of China.

The Republic of China is one of the most successful examples of economic development in the twenty-first century. It is now the world's seventeenth largest economy in terms of GNP, the fifteenth most important trading country and the sixteenth largest foreign direct investor. It possesses the third largest amount of foreign reserves in the world.

The Republic of China is also a humanitarian-minded country. Over the years it was sent over 10,000 experts to countries in Asia, the South Pacific, Latin America and Africa to help develop their agricultural, fishery and aquacultural industries. Over the past years, it also has provided disaster relief to various countries throughout the world, including the People's Republic of China, and has responded to the United Nations appeals for emergency relief and rehabilitation assistance to countries suffering from natural disasters and the ravages of war.

Taiwan contributes to regional development programmes through international financial institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, the Inter-American Development Bank, the African Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Taiwan is fully committed to upholding the international norms of human rights spearheaded by the United Nations. In his inaugural speech in May 2000 and again in his New Year address to the nation in January 2001, President Chen pointed out that the Republic of China would abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of China has introduced a draft version of the basic law on the protection of human rights, which includes sections devoted to the rights of women, children, labourers, the physically and mentally challenged, senior citizens and aborigines.

4. The United Nations should take note of the recent conciliatory gestures of the Republic of China towards the People's Republic of China, and play a facilitating role by providing a forum for their reconciliation and rapprochement.

President Chen, in his year-end national address in 2000, appealed to the Government and leaders on the Chinese mainland to overcome the current dispute and deadlock over the Taiwan Strait through tolerance, foresight and wisdom.

On 1 January 2001, the Republic of China implemented "three mini-links" to launch direct trade, postal and shipping links between Taiwan's two offshore island groups of Kinmen and Matsu and Mainland China's Xiamen and Fuzhou. Taiwan hopes to foster mutual confidence and gradually build mutual trust between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait through those links.

With a view to promoting exchanges across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan has granted permission to journalists from Mainland China to be posted for a period of one month in Taiwan so as to facilitate coverage of Taiwan, to Mainland China spouses of Taiwan residents to work in Taiwan, to banks in Taiwan to open representative offices in Mainland China, to high-ranking officials to visit Mainland China, and to an exchange of information on criminal activities between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

As an organization dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of international peace and security, the United Nations should facilitate reconciliation and a peace process between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. The United Nations can serve as a forum to build mutual understanding and goodwill between the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China.

5. In the world of increasing globalization, the General Assembly should act to ensure that the voice of the 23 million people on Taiwan is heard in the United Nations and its related organizations.

Tremendous changes have taken place globally in the past two decades. The world is facing increasingly demanding tasks in eradicating disease and poverty, combating HIV/AIDS, protecting the environment and endangered species, regulating human migration and population growth, and promoting human rights and dignity. Many of those issues call for global and comprehensive efforts that transcend traditional national boundaries. To be more effective and efficient, these joint efforts require not only broader support and cooperation from national Governments, but also greater involvement and participation form civil society actors and individuals. As the world organization with the most comprehensive functions, the States Members of the United Nations should invite all the members of the international community to join in the partnership to further the objectives and purposes of the United Nations.

People around the world are confronting new challenges in the new millennium. Reconciliation has replaced confrontation as the dominant spirit of the twenty-first century and the mainstream value of the international community. It is high time that the United Nations seriously reconsider the abnormal situation of continued exclusion of Taiwan from this most important global forum. With the participation of the Republic of China, the United Nations can live up to its principle of universality, achieve its goal of preventive diplomacy and facilitate the cross-strait reconciliation and peace process.

Annex II to the letter dated 8 August 2001 from the representatives of Belize, Burkina Faso, Chad, Dominica, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nicaragua, Palau, Senegal and Tuvalu to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Draft resolution

The General Assembly,

Considering, with concern, the fact that the twenty-three million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan are the only remaining people in the world who still do not have actual and legitimate representation in the United Nations,

Recognizing that since 1949 the Government of the Republic of China has exercised effective control and jurisdiction over the Taiwan area while the Government of the People's Republic of China has exercised effective control and jurisdiction over the Chinese mainland during the same time period,

Acknowledging that the Republic of China on Taiwan is a constructive and responsible member of the international community, with a democratic system and a strong, vibrant economy,

Observing that the strategic location of Taiwan is vital to the peace and security of the East Asian and Pacific regions and that the differences between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait should be resolved peacefully in the interest of international peace and security,

Mindful of the fact that the Republic of China has committed itself to peaceful resolution of differences with the People's Republic of China and has repeatedly offered friendly and conciliatory gestures to the leadership of the People's Republic of China,

Noting the declaration of the Government of the Republic of China on Taiwan that it accepts without condition the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations, that it is able and willing to carry out those obligations and that it is also fully committed to observing the principles and spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Stressing the significance that recognition of and respect for the fundamental rights of the twenty-three million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan would have for upholding the principles and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations,

Decides:

(a) To establish a working group of the General Assembly with the mandate of examining thoroughly the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan with a view to ensuring that its twenty-three million people participate in the United Nations and its related agencies and thereby contribute actively to the international community;

(b) To invite the representatives of the Republic of China to take part in the work of the working group;

(c) To express its concern about cross-strait tension and its possible impact upon regional peace, stability and prosperity, and to encourage the Republic of

China on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China to resume dialogue and communications on the basis of equal footing and peaceful solution;

(d) To call for a peaceful resolution of differences between the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China, which bears heavily on the peace and security of Asia and the Pacific, and to encourage the international community to pay close attention to the situation in that region.

United Nations A/56/193/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
31 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

Need to examine the exceptional international situation pertaining to the Republic of China on Taiwan, to ensure that the fundamental right of its twenty-three million people to participate in the work and activities of the United Nations is fully respected

Letter dated 8 August 2001 from the representatives of Belize, Burkina Faso, Chad, Dominica, El Salvador, the Gambia, Nicaragua, Palau, Senegal and Tuvalu to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Addendum

Add the following names to the list of signatories:

(*Signed*) Ramón A. **Morales Quijano**
Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Jeremiah **Manele**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Permanent Mission of Solomon Islands to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Joel M. **Nhleko**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
Permanent Mission of Swaziland to the United Nations

01-52619 (E) 040901

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General Assembly

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10 August 2001

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Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

Peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula

Letter dated 10 August 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, entitled "Peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula". I recommend that the matter be considered directly in the plenary meeting during the main part of the fifty-sixth session.

Pursuant to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, this request is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum (see annex).

(*Signed*) **Sun** Joun-yung
Permanent Representative

01-50931 (E) 140801

Annex

Explanatory memorandum

The historic inter-Korean summit meeting held in Pyongyang in June 2000 and the announcement of the Joint Declaration, the first of its kind since the division of the peninsula more than half a century ago, represented a major breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. Since the summit meeting, both sides have engaged in a number of exchanges and cooperative efforts for peace and stability on the peninsula and, at the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula" (resolution 55/1 of 31 October 2000), welcoming and encouraging the peace and reconciliation process on the peninsula.

Recognizing the commitment of both sides to the implementation of the inter-Korean agreements and the continued interest of Member States in furthering the peace process, I hope that the General Assembly will reaffirm its support for the smooth implementation of the Joint Declaration and other agreements between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea. In this context, I request the inclusion of a supplementary item, entitled "Peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula", in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. In view of the nature of the item, it is requested that it be considered in the plenary meeting.

United Nations A/56/194*

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the fifty-sixth session

Peace, security and reunification on the Korean peninsula

Letter dated 10 August 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

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(*Signed*) **Sun** Joun-yung
Permanent Representative

* Reissued for technical reasons.

01-50931* (E) 280801

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